

SPRIT OF THE PRESS.

Editorial Opinions of the Leading Journals upon Current Topics—Compiled Every Day for the Evening Telegraph.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

From the N. Y. Tribune.

With very little preliminary fuss and debate, the British Government has carried into effect a radical reform in the system of appointments to office, similar in its general features to the great change advocated in this country by Mr. Jencks. An examination of candidates for certain civil offices has long been practiced in England; but heretofore, by an order of the Queen in Council, this rule is to be greatly extended, so as to apply to all appointments except under the Foreign Office and a very few others expressly mentioned. Anybody who wants a Government place may present himself for examination upon his physical fitness, his moral and intellectual character, his general education, and his special knowledge of the duties he desires to fulfill. The candidate who appears by the report of the examiners to be best qualified will receive the appointment on a probation of six months, during which he will still further be tried, and at the end of that time, if the results of the trial are satisfactory, he will be permanently assigned to duty, subject only to removal by the chief of the department to which he is attached.

Here is a sweeping change by which politics as a trade ought to be revolutionized if not entirely abolished. It is not so many years since a British statesman would have thought the Constitution subverted and the country on the brink of ruin if the party which had the good luck to come in could not displace the appointees of the party which had the bad luck to go out, and fill the comfortable desks of Government with their own most useful supporters. How her Majesty's Government was to be carried on, sir, unless the younger sons and poor relations of the great governing families could be provided for; how the indispensable adhesion of the Duke of This and my Lord That was to be secured without a judicious distribution of places among the friends and dependants for whom those pillars of the State felt bound to provide, were problems which the Sir Leicester Radlocks of the Whig quite as well as the Tory party felt themselves utterly unable to solve. How was a man to get into Parliament if he could not reward those who were most active in putting him there? How were ministers to command a majority in the House if they had no patronage wherewith to pay for votes? Mr. Gladstone has cut the Gordian knot of these difficulties at one blow. He has destroyed the Irish Church Establishment. He has extended the suffrage and half promised the ballot. Now he has destroyed patronage, and still the British empire stands on the Foreign Office. The sure, is left, a last refuge for aristocratic good-for-nothings, a dumping ground, so to speak, for the nobility, bearing a sign to the effect that "Rubbish may be shot here," and there are certain offices also filled directly by the crown to which the competitive system does not apply; but these exceptions are too few to affect the general result, and may perhaps hereafter be brought under the general rule.

It is very true that a formal examination is not always the best gauge of ability. A man of nervous or excitable temperament is apt to blunder through a written examination with more than his fair share of assurance placed at an unjust advantage. Still, if the examination is properly conducted it will hardly fail to detect either a fool or a man of exceptional ability, and in any case the new mode of choice must be a great improvement upon the present, in which fitness is not considered at all. A sensible competitive examination, followed by the practical test of a six months' probation, ought to insure the Government able, diligent, and well-conducted servants. The chief of a department will always have the power to discharge those who, after all the previous tests, are still found incompetent or idle; and as his own comfort will depend upon a good administration of his office, he may be trusted to exercise that power whenever it becomes necessary. On the other hand he has not the power of appointment, and therefore will seldom be tempted to remove without cause in order to make room for his own friends. Thus, as man by the process of natural selection is supposed to have been developed from the monkey, so the breed of office-holders may be indefinitely improved by a similar operation of what Mr. Darwin calls the "struggle for existence and survival of the fittest."

We are not sanguine of the immediate adoption of any such reform in the United States—principally for the reason that we are so very much in want of it. The incompetency of Government officials is a comparatively trifling evil in this country, but the patronage system has become such a tremendous weapon of corruption that few politicians are willing to give it up, and few party leaders have the courage to pledge a hearty support to the movement for reforming it out of existence. While office is bartered and sold as it is now, and votes are given for political principles but for a petty custom-house clerkship, it is only by rare and fortunate accident that we can get the best men into positions of trust and power, or secure a majority in Congress with the nerve and discrimination to apply the remedy to this threatening disorder of our political system. Congressmen have come to look upon office-brokerage as one of the chief of their legitimate duties. Candidates have learned to buy their elections, not indeed by the petty bribery of individual voters, but by an explicit or implied promise of office to influential wire-pullers, stump-speakers, and local politicians—in other words, by buying extensive vote-dealers at wholesale. And it is an evidence of the injurious effect of this corrupt system upon the whole tone of public life that so many of our respectable statesmen do not see or will not acknowledge that the bribery of patronage, whether for personal aims or "the good of the party," is a dangerous assault upon the fundamental theory of the republic, namely, that a free expression of the popular will should dictate the policy of the State.

DROWNING AS A FINE ART.

From the N. Y. Times.

In Victor Hugo's romance of "Notre Dame," there occurs a thrilling description of a scene that ensues after Quasimodo has hurled Claude Frolo from the summit of the great tower. The miserable priest has caught hold of some projection a few feet from the top. He can by no possibility draw himself up, and his fall is therefore only a question of time. An abyss of a hundred and fifty feet deep yawns below him, while above, leaning over the parapet and gazing on his victim with impassive malignity, is the avenging

Hunchback. By stretching forth his hand he could save his enemy from his impending fate; but Quasimodo calmly rests his chin on his palms, and with eyes fastened on Claude Frolo's despairing face, waits for him to become exhausted, and then fall. The situation is one of the most awful and impressive that can be imagined, and the reader willingly believes that only in fiction can such an incident be possible.

And yet a very similar scene occurred in real life, near Boston, on Monday last—the difference consisting in the circumstance that whereas the implacable Hunchback is depicted as revenging the wrongs of the being dearest to him on each his Boston imitator seems to have had no motive for his crime except sheer cruelty. Further investigation may modify this aspect of the affair, but as at present related no incentive whatever is apparent save that which might be derived from a brutal disposition. It seems that as the City Marshal of Charlestown was crossing City Point Bridge, accompanied by a patrolman, he was accosted by some boys, who said that a friend of theirs had just been drowned. The officers procured grappling irons, dragged the water in the spot pointed out, and succeeded in recovering the body of a youth eleven years of age, named Eastman, the only son of one of the officials of the State Prison. The body was quite inanimate when found, and while efforts were being made to restore life, the companions of the dead child narrated the circumstances of his death. They declared that a man whom they pointed out, and who, while they were telling their story, was quietly stacking lumber on an adjoining wharf in full view, had seized and thrown young Eastman into the water. Some of their number appealed to him, and begged to save the boy, as he could not swim; but the inhuman wretch, deaf to their entreaties, coolly watched the struggling child until he had sunk for the third time, and then, saying it was too late to save him, returned calmly to his work. We recollect in the annals of crime scarcely any parallel to this. Plunder, vengeance, sudden and furious passion, have furnished occasion for homicides innumerable; but the deliberate drowning of a fellow-creature by way of diversion, or for purposes of mere speculative curiosity, has had, we believe, unless it be in Dahomey, or some similar remote and uncivilized region, no parallel in the annals of crime.

As it stands, the tragedy furnishes a surprising realization of a well-known fantastic essay of De Quincy's. The opium-eater in that essay gives an illustrative example of murder considered as a fine art, treating the subject in a vein of exquisitely humorous gravity, the enjoyment of which is unalloyed by the faintest suspicion of the possibility of the incident described. It seems, however, that such things really can be. In the Boston case there are two circumstances that complicate the problem in its psychological aspects. When the companions of the drowning boy begged assistance, would he rather make an effort to rescue him, they tried to render him assistance. One brave lad, named Hunter, was indeed almost successful in his attempt, having reached young Eastman, and nearly got him to the shore, but becoming exhausted, was obliged to let him go. The speculative artist on the wharf appears to have made no resistance to this, although it threatened seriously to interrupt his entertainment. Now, unless we accept the hypothesis that he hoped, by remaining passive, to have the pleasure of seeing two people drown instead of one, his course in this respect is not quite intelligible. Again, on being taken into custody, he expressed not the slightest concern for what he had done, but accepted the situation with the same philosophic equanimity which had marked his behavior from the first. There is no statement that he had ever shown signs of insanity, nor, unless the present achievement is reckoned a proof of such a thing, is he now supposed to be mentally irresponsible. It is said, indeed, that he has on previous occasions thrown other boys into the water, and as in each instance they were safely pulled out before he could have the crowning felicity of seeing them drown, his conduct, while doubtless worthy of some bitter disappointments as extenuating his present indiscretion.

Hanging Mr. murder is not, we believe, "played out" as yet in Boston, but the penalty of the scaffold by way of atonement for drowning as a fine art, or for a summer day's amusement, may possibly be deprecated in that transcendental city. In any event, let us hope that some rational check may be put upon a pastime which, however original and ingenious, is conceived a trifle too much in the interest of certain theories of Mr. Malthus to be either expedient or agreeable. The spectacle of a head-brother morning in a desolated home over her first-born is not a good companion picture to that of the calm murderer sitting grimly on the wharf, and gloating as his unhappy victim chokes in his death agony; and if neither the rope nor the Massachusetts State Prison is adjudged to furnish resources of suitable application to the case, the lunatic asylum assuredly ought to be called into requisition.

THE EXCLUSION OF WHITEMORE.

From the N. Y. World.

The decision of the House in Whittemore's case was technically wrong, but substantially right, and although disapproved by many lawyers, it will be indorsed by the moral sense of the people. Whittemore's claim to a seat was denied, and his credentials returned, by a vote of 124 to 29—a majority of more than four to one.

Mr. Logan's argument against the claim was lame and inconclusive so far as it proceeded on merely legal and parliamentary grounds. The precedents all go to show that when an expelled member is re-elected by his constituents, the House is precluded from arraigning him a second time for the same offense. But Mr. Logan contended that Whittemore's case is taken out of the scope of such precedents, by an indictable offense, whereas no member of the House who had ever been expelled and re-elected had violated a penal statute. He quoted the law which makes the selling of cadetships a felony, and declares the perpetrator infamous and incapable of holding office. If Whittemore had been convicted and sentenced for his offense, and the President had pardoned him, every lawyer knows that the pardon would restore his eligibility to office. When the sentence is merely parliamentary, and not judicial, there is still a pardoning authority; but in this case it is lodged with the consistency of the member. They can condone his offense, and a pardon by them should receive the same respect from the House that would be given to an executive pardon after conviction by a court of justice. In this view the offending member should be treated as a pardoned criminal liable to no further punishment unless he committed a new offense.

The decision to exclude Whittemore after his constituents had condoned his offense by a re-election, is a signal declaration of contempt for his constituency. No doubt this contempt is richly deserved. The heavy majority of eight thousand negro votes by which

this broker of cadetships, this venal scamp, this unconvicted felon, was re-elected as their Representative, demonstrates the utter unfitness of the Southern negro for the political functions thrust upon them by the Reconstruction acts. By their fruits shall ye know them. The re-election of this disgraced felon and thief is an instructive commentary on the wisdom of negro reconstruction. It is no longer President Johnson's vetoes or Democratic denunciations that bear witness against that insane experiment, but a solemn, deliberate, and almost unanimous vote of the Radical Congress itself. It is a Republican House of any office or trust or profit under the United States. But by that statute the disability ensues only as the consequence of conviction by a court of justice. But Whittemore has never been convicted, nor even tried. If a court had found him guilty and passed sentence upon him, Mr. Logan's argument would have been conclusive. He attempted to strengthen it in its weak point by contending that the former action of the House in condemnation of Whittemore was equivalent to a judicial conviction. This fetch is too flimsy to bear a moment's examination. If Whittemore should be chosen a Grant Presidential elector in 1872, the difference between the legal effect of judicial sentence and of a parliamentary censure would be quite apparent. After a judicial conviction his vote as a Presidential elector could not be counted; but the censure of the House would not operate as a bar. Representatives that has impugned the character of a negro constituency, and declared its unfitness for political duties. It is not Whittemore alone that is condemned, but the black voters who sent back this exposed rascal to represent them in Congress. The real culprit involved in the vote of Tuesday extends beyond Whittemore to the negro constituency, and beyond the constituency to the Congress and the political party that created it. It used to be said of slavery that it degraded labor by the contempt it caused for those who performed labor. With equal truth it may be said that negro voting degrades the elective franchise by the contempt it causes for those who exercise the franchise. The practical working of negro reconstruction is such that its very authors pronounce its results disgraceful. It has fostered into Congress a set of scoundrels and carpet-baggers of whom the world has never heard, and Congress finds no way to protect itself against the disgrace but by denying the right of the people to select their representatives, and to exercise their prerogative of condoning their offenses and giving them a new trial. The reconstruction system is a blow at representative government. It has created a set of constituencies so notoriously unfit to exercise the rights of electors, that Congress is compelled to protect itself against disgraceful associations by denying the competency of constituents to choose their representatives. The judgment in Whittemore's case is substantially correct, and the principle of the law it rests upon to have been applied at an earlier stage of the experiment and have prevented this revolting degradation of Congressional constituencies.

THE NORTH-GERMAN EMPIRE.

From the London Spectator.

The processes of digestion are not performed in public, and we do not wonder, therefore, that the success of the Hohenzollerns in assimilating their new acquisitions attracts comparatively little attention. It is, however, very noteworthy, more especially as regards the foreign morals—the States which must be absorbed without any visible crunching. That Schleswig-Holstein, Hanover, Nassau, Frankfurt, and the rest should by degrees acquiesce in their destiny, and leave Jacobinism to respectable but diminishing coteries, was to be expected. Men do not rise against a government so powerful as that of Prussia without grave provocation, and grave provocation has not been received, except by a body of men too few to make resistance anything but a dream. The Danish inhabitants of Schleswig are no doubt oppressed, as they regard the foreign morals—the States which must be absorbed without any visible crunching. 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